

Coptic Miniatures in Egyptian Churches and Monasteries

Author(s): H. R. H. John George

Source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 23, No. 124 (Jul., 1913), pp. 202-204

Published by: Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/859329>

Accessed: 27-01-2021 16:17 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*

The Sources of Design in Italian Maiolica

figures from *The Judgment of Paris* by the same master after a design by Raphael. In the last two instances the figures have of course been truncated, so as to appear immersed to the knees in water. The Actæon woodcut has also been followed with very slight variation for the trees on a rocky eminence which fill the middle distance. The composition is admirably arranged in broad bands horizontally traversing the circular field. No better example could be cited of the success in

the handling of engraved subjects attainable by a maiolica-painter of the first order.

It is not the writer's intention to detail all the many instances of designs traceable to their source with which he is acquainted. These notes will not have been written in vain if they suggest to future writers on maiolica and compilers of catalogues an aspect of the subject worthy of more careful attention than hitherto it has generally received.

COPTIC MINIATURES IN EGYPTIAN CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES

BY H.R.H. JOHN GEORGE, DUKE OF SAXONY

IN Egyptian churches and monasteries only comparatively few manuscripts have survived. Most of them have long since been carried off to Europe. Only a few of those still remaining contain miniatures. In one alone are figures to be found, in all the others ornamental subjects only. The single manuscript with figures in the miniature painting is at Deir-Abu-Sefein in Old Cairo, and is only shown with great reluctance. I was the first person to be allowed to take photographs of it. Unluckily only two were successful, and these only partially so; the third—that is to say, the photograph of the first miniature in the book—did not succeed at all. I will, however, begin with this in my description. Its subject occupies, like the two others, the whole page.

Above one sees the busts of Jesus and Mary. Below on one side is represented the Conversion of S. Paul. He has fallen from an ass, a genuine Oriental note, since with us the steed from which he has fallen is always a horse. His companions lie round about him. In the clouds is seen the Hand of God. On the other side is S. Paul preaching to his disciples. This representation is quite in accordance with other similar scenes of teachers and pupils in Byzantine miniature paintings. This page forms the title-page to the Epistles of S. Paul.

The second miniature painting [PLATE, A] represents a quite unusual scene. Four Apostles stand close together, these being Judas Thaddæus, John, Peter and James the Less. Contrary to Greek art, John is represented quite young; James, on the other hand, is extremely old. Peter is of the familiar type. For Thaddæus, so far as I know, no special type has ever existed. This page forms the title-page to the Epistles of these Apostles.

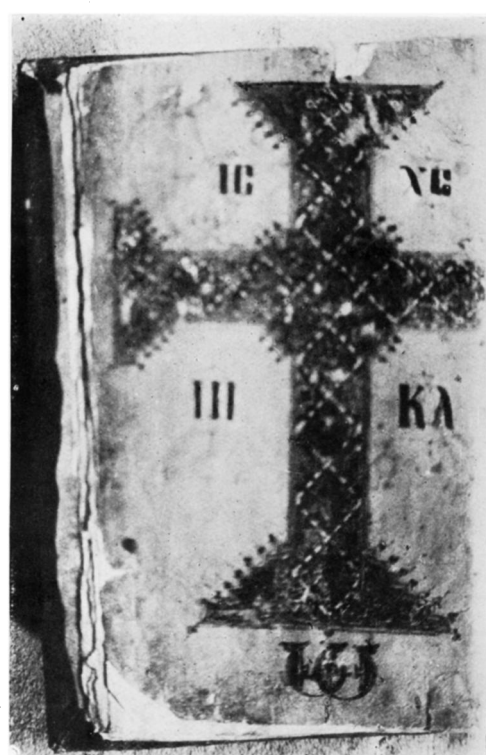
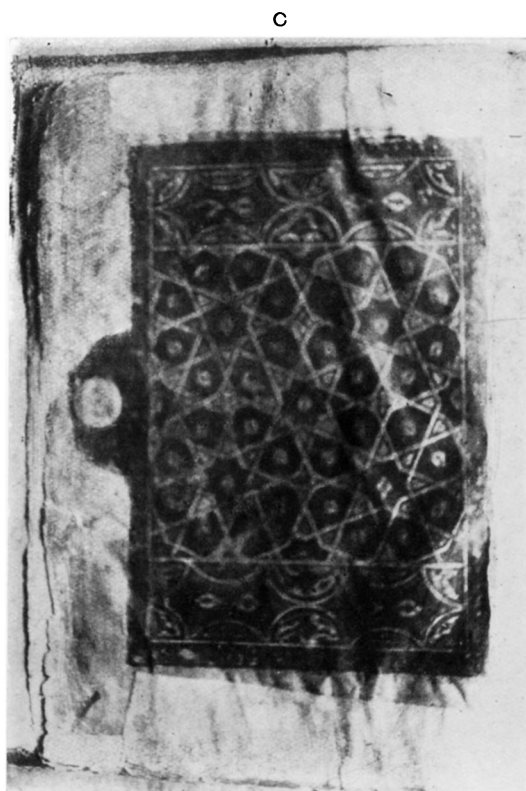
The third miniature [PLATE, B] represents the Ascension of Christ. The Lord rises to heaven seated on a cushion, within the familiar *mandorla* glory, borne by four angels. Below stands the

Virgin between the twelve Apostles. This is also the traditional representation found invariably in the East. Christ is represented with a scanty beard, which is characteristic of Egypt, and can be seen on old reliefs. The Coptic monks also for the most part wear scanty beards. This leaf forms the title-page to the "Acts of the Apostles".

Besides these three subject paintings, there is also a series of ornaments and initials throughout the manuscript. The writing is simple, but very fine. The colours have been wonderfully well preserved. The gold shines like new. The manuscript is dated 1289, and was used at the celebration of the Mass, at which three epistles were always read, the first from the Epistles of S. Paul, the second from the other Epistles, and the third from the "Acts of the Apostles". This is further shown by the order in which the writings are placed.

From the 14th century onwards the Copts introduced into their manuscripts ornamental miniatures only. This must be attributed to the influence of Islam, to which indeed was due a new spirit of art in this century. Moreover, these ornamental paintings often remind one of those which are to be found in the Korans. In Deir-Abu-Sefein there is a Book of Gospels of 1326 which already contains such ornaments. They are numerous in the monasteries of the Nitrian Desert. I am able to specify here two of these, which are to be found in a manuscript of the 14th century in Deir-es-Suriani, the only one, so far as my memory goes, which is still preserved in that monastery.

The richest library is that of Deir-Abu-Makarios, although one cannot speak of any real treasures there. Many manuscripts contain ornamental miniatures, the best being of the 14th century. Of these I give four illustrations taken from a Book of Gospels and a Lectionary. The leaf illustrated in PLATE, C, shows the strongest Mahomedan influence, and might just as well have decorated a Koran as an Evangelarium.




Coptic Miniatures in Egyptian Churches and Monasteries

The diaper pattern is very finely executed, and the colours are remarkably well preserved. The second leaf [D] is taken from the same manuscript, but not the two last [E] and [F]. In many of these Coptic books the decoration does not occupy the whole page, but only the lower left-hand portion. Much the finest and most precious leaf illustrated here [PLATE, E] is a full-page title to a Lectionary, bearing an elaborately decorated cross with the four ends expanded into triangles enriched with little points. Between them are initials denoting Jesus Christ the Conqueror. We have here in its fuller sense the meaning of a

Crux Gemmata, and one can speak with confidence of a revival of Christian and Muhamadan art. The miniatures of the 15th and 16th centuries are of no particular importance.

All these miniatures, with the exception of those in Deir-Abu-Sefein, will bring little new information to connoisseurs. They ought, however, to have some value towards a further knowledge of art in the Christian Orient, and especially they may claim to show how powerfully at this late date the influence of Islam on the Copts is evident, even in the remote monasteries of Natron.

THE REPRESENTATION OF MOVEMENT IN ART BY MARTIN ALDUR

 SINCE instantaneous photography is of its very nature unable to record movement, while art is able to represent it, nothing perhaps will help us better to understand some of the principles that underlie our perception of movement, and consequently affect its representation in art, than a comparison of instantaneous photography with the work of great artists.

Movement is change; and our sense of movement is an abstract idea, the resultant of a series of combined impressions. It is the perception of change due to the comparison of the visual images of successive moments, just as our sense of music is the comparison of a succession of sounds.

Indeed, I think anyone who has watched a greyhound running must feel that the undulations of the animal with their rhythmic series and culminating accents are comparable to an air in music, while a momentary phase in the movement, such as is recorded in an instantaneous photograph, resembles a detached chord, and, like it, has little meaning out of its context.

For our sensations are not momentary, but endure after the causes that excited them have ceased, otherwise we should be incapable of perceiving all change, and should only be sensible to the impressions of each particular instant disconnected from all that comes before or after, and, like the camera, we should see the separate attitudes of which a movement is composed, but not the movement itself.

"But what of the cinematograph and its moving pictures which are based upon instantaneous photography?" some reader will perhaps exclaim. Exactly—the cinematograph can indeed *reconstruct* movement, but then it is real movement, which the eye actually follows across the screen, not its artistic representation in a fixed and unchanging material, such as those in which the painter and the sculptor work, and in which lies their strength. For their purpose is not to reconstruct nature, but

to crystallize in an enduring form the effects, by directing attention to which they communicate certain emotions to the spectator. Let us consider a particular instance: picture to yourself a wet day, and instinctively you will represent the falling rain as making lines across the landscape. If you look at an instantaneous photograph of such a scene you will see separate rain-drops dotted about upon it. Which is the more satisfactory representation? Which gives the "truth"? Which brings about in the mind of the observer the right optical condition? The answer is not doubtful, and it is an answer endorsed by the cinematograph, for it is only able to show us movement because it restores such generalized impressions lost in the separate photographs.

Indeed, these lines of falling rain illustrate a principle that affects all our perception of movement. If we return for a moment to the definition of our perception of movement as a perception of change—of change of position (change of shape is merely change of position of component parts)—we shall agree, I think, that there can be no real impression of movement which does not imply a perception of its direction. And direction can be best expressed diagrammatically by a line or lines. What in fact are the lines of falling rain but nature's diagrams, the paths of the raindrops traced by faint images of themselves? Whatever instances we take, the curves of a swallow's flight, the appearance of a circle created by a thing whirled rapidly about a centre, the undulations of the coursing greyhound, the movements of a group of dancers, we find in each of them this same principle that all movement is perceived more or less distinctly as lines of direction—that is, as flow or rhythm.

Consequently if the artist is to create in the mind of the observer the desired optical condition he cannot dispense with the fundamental impression of rhythm. In fact, in all art movement is expressed by rhythms slow or rapid, regular or variable, continuous or interrupted, according as the effect or